

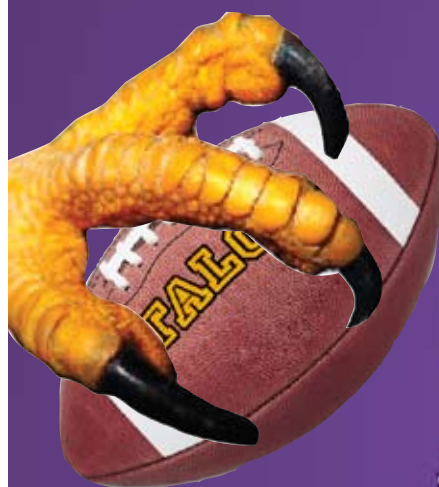
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# Campus Faces

December 2009

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James Stewart, Jr. serves as the senior college footballer. This kind-hearted young man loves to read and play football for the Avila Eagles. When meeting him for the first time one would only notice his upbeat and positive attitude and a willingness to go out of his way to make others happy. However, under this bright and bubbly surface lies a secret that an outsider would never assume. One that arouses strong feelings and, at the same time, magnifies the awe at his ability to remain optimistic. And this secret is his past. One night during the early goings of the second semester of his junior year at Leavenworth High School in Leavenworth, Kansas, 15 year-old Stewart was asked by his mother and father to go down into the basement for a family meeting. Nervously he followed them, knowing that they might be aware of the double life he was leading. Away from home, Stewart lived as who he was, an openly gay teenager. While he was comfortable with friends and strangers knowing this about him, it was one fact that he had never imagined revealing to his parents. He knew their stance on issues of that sort. His father, a pastor of a non-denominational, Bible centered church, had in the past informed James and his eight siblings that if any of them "turned gay, they were gone." His beautiful mother shared similar loveless anger feelings on the subject.

Knowing this made Stewart's mood more as he descended the stairs toward his basement. Once settled in, Stewart faced the stern expressions locked on the faces of his parents. He had only seen this mix of shock and disgust one other time. A few months prior to this evening, Stewart's parents had discovered that their son was having a sexual relationship with one of his slightly younger male friends. When confronted about it, Stewart said that they were merely experimenting and he was not gay. While his parents were then convinced by his statement, they never questioned the legitimacy of his words. As Stewart started an explanation for the incident, he noticed that his mother was holding an open letter. It was a single piece of paper that had come from a classmate. It simply read, "Hello, I go to school with your son and I think you should know that he is gay." Stewart's parents demanded an explanation, but the answer they received was not the one they wanted. Tired of living his double life, Stewart came out to his parents. He told them that, yes, he was gay. He has been gay his whole life and that is just the way he is. Anger and hatred rang out from his parents' mouths. His mother believed that he was possessed by a gay demon and, not knowing what to do she called the police. When the operator answered, she asked, "Can you come arrest my son? He's gay." While a person cannot be locked away for homosexuality, a campus is still dispatched. When the police arrived, she wanted him gone, she wanted him locked up in a jail, an institution, just anywhere except home. When the officers said that they could not fulfill her demands, she brought up the sexual experimentation that James had been involved in. With this information, and a call to the district attorney, Stewart was taken away and booked on two counts. One was criminal sodomy; the other, indecent liberties with a minor. "The age of consent in Kansas is 16," Stewart states "and even though we were both minors, I was a little older than him so they were able to charge me." Stewart elaborates and adds, "What's interesting is that Kansas has a law called the Romeo and Juliet law that would have gotten the indecent liberties charge dropped. However it only applies to minor boys and girls having sex, so since I was gay, I was still in trouble." Stewart spent several weeks in a juvenile complex before being sent to a group home where other juvenile offenders awaited their court dates. On his sweet 16th birthday, he was then moved to Marillac Treatment Center where his parents attempted, as Stewart says, "to therapy the gay out of me." After spending six months there, his court date arrived and Stewart was given two options: He could argue the charges, and in doing so he would face five years in juvenile as well as have his mother, father, and the young man he had the sexual encounter with testify against him. His other option was to take a plea bargain that lowered his sentence to three years, and in doing so the charge of criminal sodomy would be dropped. He took the plea and was sent to the Kansas Juvenile Correctional Complex, a.k.a. "the Baby Pen", in Lawrence, Kansas for 36 months. While he was released early for good behavior, Stewart spent two years of his youth locked away and never being able to leave the complex. He walked in May 24, 2006, and did not leave until May 5, 2008. When May 5 finally arrived, he was released with nothing more than the clothes on his back. He then lived in another group home, which was a part of an independent living program. "I had an apartment to myself but everyone in the complex was a part of the program," Stewart explains, "It was like just having a room in a large house." While he had his own apartment, he had little to fill it. For the most part the only thing of true value within the walls of his temporary home is what Stewart calls his "Box of Memories". Inside, lay awards he had won at Leavenworth High School, a stack of college informational magazines that he received during his sentence, as well as a few other knickknacks from his past. While in Kansas Juvenile, Stewart attended the in house high school, Lawrence Gardner High. There he earned his diploma and took the ACT, scoring an impressive 28. He had received information from many schools, but Avila caught his eye. Avila "has a good reputation in the Kansas City area. People are like, 'Oh, wow! You go to Avila?!'...the size is also perfect, because if I had gone to a large school I feel like I would have gotten swept away in the current." Having scored so well on the ACT, Stewart received academic scholarships that cover a great deal of the cost of school. However, as the school year approached, Stewart found himself craving the game that he had not played for well over two years. He met with Assistant Head Coach and Offensive Coordinator Dan Scheible from the Eagle's football team. Stewart explained his situation, and told Scheible that even though he had not played in quite sometime, he loved the game and would play his heart out every time he stepped on the field. Scheible replied by saying that is all one can ask from a player. And with that James Stewart was enrolled into college and his football career had begun. Now, over three months after moving to Avila, Stewart has embraced his new home and those he has to share it with. However, with this new environment has come the occasional sour moments. When asked if he has encountered any bigotry or prejudice Stewart replies that, "every now and then I will hear someone say something ignorant, but I think of it as their way of coping with something different...Most of that stuff just bounces off of me because to be honest nothing (someone) says about me is going to compare to what I have been through the last couple of years." When he was asked about what he finds most interesting about people's negative feelings, he mentions the hypocrisy he has witnessed. He mentions the irony of someone calling him queer, and then going and stepping a fellow man on the behind. Also, he cannot understand how his parents could disown him. For years he had listened to his mother speak out against her own prejudice, for they had disowned her for marrying a black man. Stewart says, "she had been through the pain of this, and yet she put me through the same thing that she hated...I don't understand how you can do that to someone you're supposed to love." After reliving what probably will be the most difficult part of his life, Stewart poses a question. How did he do it? How was he able to

VOLUME XVIII ISSUE III



# Profiles:



James Stewart, Jr. seems like your typical college freshman. This kind-hearted young man loves to read and play linebacker for the Avila Eagles. When meeting him for the first time one would only notice his upbeat and positive attitude and a willingness to go out of his way to make others happy. However, under this bright and bubbly

## A HEART TOO BIG TO BE CRUSHED

by, Shawn Sullivan

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After reliving what probably will be the most difficult part of his life, Stewart was asked one final question. How did he do it? How was he able to overcome complete abandonment from his parents, being locked away for years for doing what straight people are allowed to do without punishment, and all the while being able to keep his warmth and optimism and not just becoming another product of the state? Stewart states that:

"A lot of people think that after going through all of that, I would have been beaten. I would have quit. I would have become the most mean, hateful, cold person in the world. But that's just not me, my heart's too big for that. I have had a lot of bad things happen to me, a lot of it hurts...but I just don't want to think about it anymore...All I know is I just try to have a better understanding so that someone else doesn't have to go through this. When someone tells me that they came out to their parents and everything was fine...I'm not mad or jealous, I'm happy for that person, because no one should have to have to go through what I went through."





# People you should know.



She travelled a long way to come to this school. Born in Toowoomba, Queensland in Australia, Renee Rudder arrived in the United States this past August. She landed in Las Vegas and though she got to hike in the mountains, Vegas was not her thing. “Big flashing lights in the city; I didn’t like it that

## FROM THE OUTBACK TO THE MIDWEST

by, Sarah Wilks

much. If you’re not 21, there’s basically nothing to do. Dry, hot, not really something for teens,” she recounts. When she arrived in the Midwest, the environment felt more real to her than Las Vegas. Here, she says she felt truly in America. “It actually surprised me how friendly the people are here... people are generally nicer, more authentic.”

Rudder, who just goes by Renee on campus,

is an 18-year-old English Literature major in her Freshman year at Avila. She came here on a soccer scholarship and is Avila’s goal keeper for the Women’s Soccer team.

Renee is a pretty outgoing and upbeat person. She looks forward to getting up in the morning, attending campus events, drinking tea or coffee, and taking up new past times. One could describe her as a ‘go getter.’ As she says, “I love learning things I didn’t know before.”

She is learning a lot about Kansas City culture, though she does not see it as a city. “It’s more of a country town. There’s no high rise buildings, there’s no business people bustling about,” she says. Renee is anxious for her first faunt in the snow.

Going to the grocery store is, as she puts it, weird for Renee to try to buy food.

“I have no idea what anything is.” JIF peanut butter stood out because, back in Australia, Jif is the brand name for the cleaning product one might use to clean a stove. It is okay though, she prefers Vegemite, which is an Australian spread made of Brewer’s yeast extract, along with vegetable and spice additives.

Since she has been in the United States, there are many things that stand out. “No one uses clothes lines, you all use machine dry. People in Australia, we just wash them and then hang them out to dry.” Granted, Australia does not get any snow. In fact, fresh water is scarce in Australia, and it is the law that showers last only five minutes. Try telling Americans they can only have five minutes in the shower. We do not realize how good we have it.

Carondelet Hall is Renee’s current abode. She has one roommate, and she likes the spaciousness of the dorms. She feels like she is provided with everything she needs; perhaps even more than she needs, stating that she misses the independence of taking care of her own living space. “I

get the impression that people expect things to be handed to them on a little platter,” Renee contends.

Having left her lifelong friends in Australia for the first time, Renee finds meeting people to be easy on the surface, meaning it’s easy to have casual relationships, but connecting with people on a deeper level is hard. “I guess I’m pretty mature for my age, so I don’t get what people do.” Gossip is immature and has no purpose for Renee. “I guess it happens with all age groups, but it just feels like high school all over again, because there is a smaller diversity of people [at Avila] compared to other campuses.”

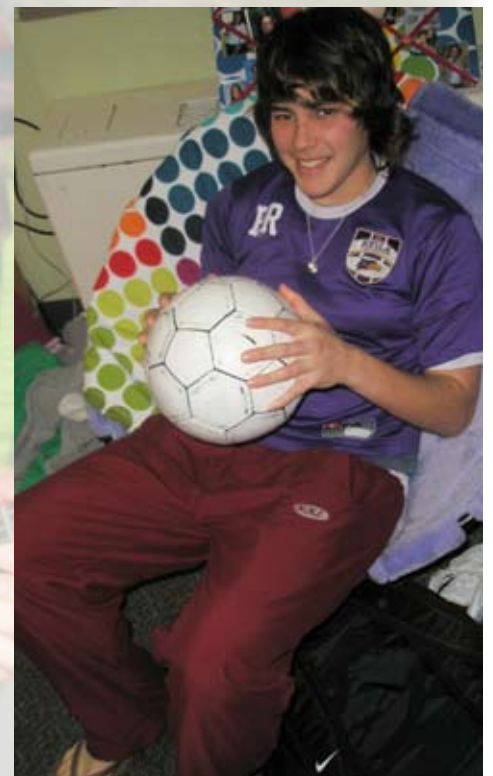
Renee lived in a rural town but spent more of her time in Brisbane going to ‘uni’— university that is— and playing soccer. She left Australia to play soccer at a higher level and decided to take the opportunity to pursue a degree that would make her happy. Previously, she had been working toward a double major in Engineering and Business in Australia, but she decided to approach a more inspiring subject, thus her switch to English Literature.

Aside from soccer, English, and drawing, which Renee manages to do fairly often, she and some new friends of hers began a band a few weeks back called ‘Face Invaders.’ Renee is the drummer. They bought the Pulse drum kit two weeks ago. “I was really excited to get a drum kit, ‘cause it meant that I could pursue a more musical and artistic side of myself. I’ve always wanted to be in a band, but never had the chance to,” says Renee.

Music is listed with emphasis as one of Renee’s top ten things in life with *Something for Kate*, a three-piece from Australia, as her favorite band. When pressed for her favorite lyric, she stated, “‘When I’m done shaking, I’ll be simple,’ which to me, means when everything’s said and done, when life’s done, when you’re finished doing what you’re doing, you’ll be simple.” Song lyrics are written all over Renee’s sketchbook and even sometimes on her arms. “Music relaxes me, provides a release,” she says.

It’s getting late. Renee has been trekking through the brush of a field beside an unknown stream. “Being near nature helps as a stress reliever. Just hearing the running stream, sitting by the water... just relaxes me, makes me not think so hard.” Back in Australia, Renee is used to having the Pacific Ocean nearby.

Those top ten things in life tell a lot about



Renee. In order, she lists friends, connections between people, soccer, “music for sure,” knowledge, getting an education, environment and the way nature is, her family, and relationships, on a different level than that of friends. The Avila experience has met a few of these needs. As Renee’s time here endures, the remaining ten continue to gain momentum and are fulfilled a little more each day.





A timeless truth in customer service is that the employee *should* do whatever possible to make the customer happy. Whether that be taking care of the customer's every need or simply greeting them with a smile and a simple "Hello." Perhaps not all employees follow this rule, but there is one woman on campus at Avila who exemplifies

## SERVICE WITH A SMILE

by Cory Stuefer

everything that a customer service worker should. From the friendly smile that she flashes at first sight, to the first name greeting and friendly conversation that follows, she truly makes walking into the café in the Marian Centre a treat for all. This woman is Ollie Thibeaux, and she has become one of the most recognizable faces on campus at Avila University.

Ollie has been working in the food service business at Avila University for a year and a half; and, as anyone who glances at her can tell, truly enjoys her work. Perhaps the most recognizable trait that separates her from other staff members is her remarkable ability to remember hundreds of students' names. Ollie claims that she knows every resident's first name and when asked how she is able to retain so many names, she attributes it to, "Paying attention, being alert, and really caring about the students. I want them to feel welcome when they come into eat." Whenever Ollie is behind the counter, nobody will argue that she does not make him or her feel welcome. However, greeting eaters with a smile and kind words is not her only responsibility in the café.

Another top priority of Ms. Thibeaux's, is keeping the café in working order. She may be greeting residents and staff during the breakfast and lunch shifts, but in between shifts is when the real work is done. "I think everybody in customer



service should be friendly but to keep people happy my job involves more than that. I help keep the tables clean and make sure we don't run out of stuff." Her daily job requirements may be tedious but she does them with great effort and high spirits (and help from the other employees, of course). Between eating shifts anybody would be hard pressed to find

Ollie *not* working in some way to make the café more presentable. From restocking napkins and cups to wiping down every table, she finds work related activities to occupy her time until the next shift begins and more hungry students walk through the doors.

Students have undoubtedly noticed Ollie's high spirits and have truly taken a liking to her at the front counter of the café. One might ask, "How can somebody show up day in and day out and keep such high spirits?" Ollie believes staying in such high spirits while at work is easy because, "Just waking up every morning is a blessing. No matter if I'm going to work or just enjoying the day."

Many know of the friendly woman who greets them as they pass for their daily meal, but few know of what interests Ollie *off* campus. Whenever she is not working at Avila, Ollie enjoys playing bingo, going to church, and, as many can imagine, LOVES to shop. "I can't wait for Thanksgiving. I plan to eat a lot and of course go shopping on Black

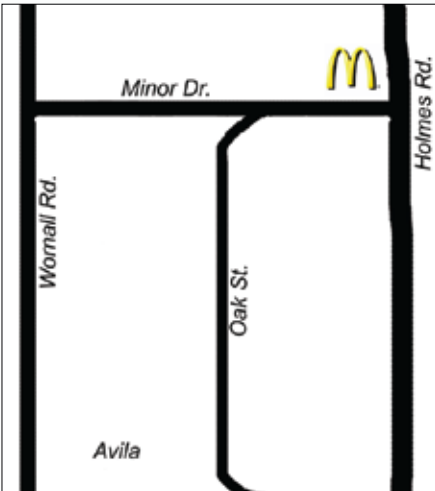
Friday the following day." She also shows a great passion for children. "I have an unbelievable love for children. I love to get involved in any kind of activities they may be doing. That could be an Avila sporting event or something the youth may be doing in the community." Ollie shows a great passion for working and communicating with people and even admits that she "would like to get promoted in the future but would rather keep interacting with people than sit behind a desk all day." Being a person of such high spirits, it is no wonder that she enjoys her movies to be comedies. "I watch a lot of comedies. Anything that can make me laugh I like watching." She was hard pressed to single out one movie as her favorite, but she had recently watched "Big Daddy" on television and stated, "I just love that movie. Adam Sandler is funny and the kid is just so cute." Ollie enjoys many forms of music, but admitted to "really loving Janet Jackson's music, even though she hasn't come out with anything new in awhile."

Ollie Thibeaux shows up everyday to work and displays kindness, compassion, and a true care for all who walk through the doors in the café. She does not display these attributes to impress her employers or just because it is professional. Ollie displays these characteristics because she has a kind and loving heart and many lessons can be taken from her personality and applied to all. She believes that "everyday is a blessing," and if students will wake up every morning with the same mindset, Avila can be a more friendly and enjoyable place. If more people adopted her philosophy, days could seem shorter and less stress filled. Enjoy these days at Avila and cherish the opportunity to wake up and think of everyday as a blessing. Regardless if students develop this frame of thought there is one thing that all can expect; Ollie will be there with a smile on her face ready to greet all who walk through the doors.



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In this past year, you have heard many comments that refer to the glass ceiling for women. Most notably was Secretary of Defense, Hillary Clinton, who was the first woman to run for the nomination of President of the United States. People believe that she “cracked” the ceiling. The same cannot be said for women filmmakers. According

## MORE THAN JUST A TEACHER

by, Mary Beth Brand

to Dr. Martha M. Lauzen, Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, a very real and tough “celluloid ceiling” exists for women in key behind-the-scenes roles. Avila is fortunate to have Nicole Esquibel knocking on that ceiling.

Nicole was a filmmaker before she began her career as an Assistant Professor at Avila University. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Communication from the University of Denver with a minor in Women’s Studies. From there, she attended the University of Iowa where she received a Master of Fine Arts in Film and Video Production. She has worked on a number of feature length documentaries and truly enjoys the collaboration. She had not even considered teaching until a friend in Brooklyn, New York suggested she get back into academia.

Before coming to Avila, she taught at Bennington College in Bennington, Vermont. As a teacher, Nicole wants her students to love what they do and find their passion in life. While here at Avila she has seen some very interesting projects and many creative individuals in her film making. Sarah Wilks, a Film and Digital Media student, had high praise for Nicole. When asked about her, Sarah said, “Nicole is the reason I came to Avila University.” Sarah enjoys Nicole’s sense of humor, down to earth attitude and vast knowledge of film. Emily



Heid, another film student, also spoke about how patient Nicole is and described her as “awesome.” Emily also stated, “She makes me excited and makes me feel like I am in the right major!” Aside from teaching Nicole continues to pursue her passion for filmmaking. One seems to complement the other.

When asked what type of films she makes, Nicole responded, “I like to create and

examine small slices of life. I think my films fall somewhere in the spectrum of a fictional ethnography. My goal is to distort the *Truth* to fit my own twisted reality.” Nicole is not really sure where her ideas come from other than her own imagination. She seems to enjoy every aspect of the filmmaking process. As far as how long a film may take to make from pre to post production, she states, “I am a tortoise, slow and steady.” Asked whether Kansas City was a good place to make films, her belief is that whatever place you are in, is a good place to make films. Funding her projects is probably the greatest obstacle.

*La Pucelle*, her last released project was shown at the 2009 Kansas City International Film Festival. Nicole describes it as a post-punk retelling of the trial of Joan of Arc. Prior to that was *Hush* (2007), which premiered at the 2008 Kansas City International Film Festival and was also selected for the Hot Springs International Documentary Film



Festival. As far as what type of movies she chooses to watch and enjoys, they are “whatever is projected once the lights go down.” She does have a favorite director, Maya Deren, whom she would have loved to work with. Maya Deren who was born in Kiev, Ukraine ended up in New York City. She was a female pioneer in motion pictures. Maya was known for her attacks on Hollywood during the 1940’s and 50’s. She believed in the development of motion pictures as a creative fine-art form. Students in Nicole’s classes would agree that this is much of what she also believes.

Asked about the film industry being difficult for women, Nicole had this to say. “I think this can be a tough world for women. But out of that comes tough women.” Nicole certainly does not portray “tough” in a negative sense, but very much in a positive way. She seems to look at this world as filled with possibilities not just problems. If something does not work one way, then she will find another. She celebrates not only in her own successes, but those of others. She is knocking on that ceiling not only as an artist but as a teacher encouraging others. In closing, her favorite movie quote comes from *Dracula*, “Listen to them. Children of the night. What music they make.”



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It has been a busy four and a half years for Andy Perkins. Since coming to Avila he has taken on a double concentrated theatre major, a psychology minor, positions on the Avila University Theatre Company board including presidency, participation in choir, a tutoring position at the Hodes Center, and an average of

## SEEING LIFE THROUGH THE EYES’ OF AN ACTOR

by, Ben Auxier

18 credit hours per semester. “Maybe 18.5, I don’t know,” said Perkins as he finished up a quick dinner of Burger King before rehearsal. Rehearsal has been a constant for him through his college years, but these rehearsals in particular do carry a special significance, even if he is not ready to acknowledge it yet. These are the rehearsals for Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*, Andy’s 16<sup>th</sup> and final show at Avila.

Theatre was not originally in Andy’s plans, nor was Avila. He had first aspired to be a psychologist or therapist, but the simple act of volunteering to fill a chorus role in a musical at his high school starting him down a path that would surprise everyone, including himself.

In his first year came his first intense acting experience in the form of a concentration camp drama called *The Grey Zone*. Director Char Gould led the cast on a journey of complete immersion into their terrible world. Andy goes on by saying, “We had this exercise ... where each character would stand in the middle of a circle of characters and we’d go around and we’d say one line, not even from the play, to each person, and because of the relationship between the characters it lent itself to changing the air before the show.”

“It’s weird looking back on it now.” says Andy. For him that first year was one of fundamental changes in how he viewed the acting process and technique. As he participated in shows *First Lady Suite*, *Grey Zone*, Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, and *Aida*, he tackled the challenge of not only learning new skills, but of unlearning bad habits and misunderstandings. “That first year of college is where I think you do the most growing,” he says, “[it’s] basically tearing everything away so you can start rebuilding again. And so the faster you let yourself get torn down, the faster you can start rebuilding.”

This process of rebuilding continued in his second year when Andy performed in the backstage comedy *Inspecting Carol*, the musical *Gypsy*, and the social justice drama *Dead Man Walking*, based off a book of first hand experience by Catholic Sister Helen Prejean. The subject matter of the play is intense; it follows the journey of a death row inmate convicted of rape and murder. It was performed at Avila as part of the Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project, an effort headed by Sister Helen. As a part of this project, the cast met with Sister Helen and attended a lecture series on the death penalty and issues of forgiveness. “I discovered how influential and how great theatre can be as a social tool to create discussion and create advancement through that discussion,” says Perkins.

He recalls the fascinating process of playing a psychotic, schizophrenic character named Lenny in the surreal drama *Marisol*. This is a prime example of Andy’s fascination with human nature. “There’s a certain point where it has to stop being academic as an actor and you have to say ‘OK, I can’t be a person saying I have schizophrenia now, I just have to see the world through the schizophrenic’s eyes.’”

Then, in his senior year, came what he calls his most satisfying experience as an actor, the chance to play the title role in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. It’s the kind of sophisticated, meaty role that few actors get the chance to do, even academically. “If I’m going to do something I’m going to throw myself into it as best as I can.



And in doing that, if the character journey is as troubling as it is for Hamlet, it can take a toll on you.”

But, says Andy, through support from his friends and advice from director Robert Foulk, he believes he was able to perform the show to the best of his ability while still maintaining his sanity.

In his final semester, he has performed in the comedy *The Foreigner*, which he says has been the most fun he has had on the Avila stage, and is currently hard at work for his role in *The Crucible*. “I actually, I haven’t reflected too much on the fact that it’s my final show, and, um, I’m going to try not to.” He is grateful to be able to work with director Robert Foulk for his final Avila project.

Andy would like to thank Robert, as well as Charlene Gould, Bill Warren, Jason Harris, Vicki Stawder, Amity Bryson, and Gene Mackey. He would also like to thank his parents for being so supportive in his passions, even if at first they didn’t fully understand them. As for the future, Andy is looking into grad school and is leaving his possibilities as open as possible. For him, it simply “depends on where I can make a living doing what I love.”



For incoming and future theatre students, Andy encourages a full, unabated involvement and exploration, as well as an abandonment of ego. “Throwing yourself into something before you understand it is so much better than sitting back and just watching other people do it until you understand it ... if you’re the one making the mistakes, then you’re the one learning the most from them.”

Finally, says Andy, keep a good perspective. “Acting was created to tell

stories ... and it’s evolved into something more because as we’ve realized that stories can make people laugh and they can make people cry and they can be cathartic experiences and bring about social change, the status of actor has become elevated because of all these things. And I think in some cases it starts to overshadow what’s truly important; the story. And our job is basically to get up there and present the story as honestly as possible. And that’s it.”



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